

## Graduate School Application Task List

- 1) Decide which type of degree you want or need: Master's, Specialist, Doctorate, professional (law or medicine) or other
  - a. Seek advice from your faculty advisor
  - b. Talk to people working in your chosen field
    - i. Try "Career Connections" on the Career Services web page to connect with GVSU graduates in your field
- 2) Check your qualifications for the type of degree programs you want: GPA, appropriate/required courses, research experience, practicum/work experience, etc
- 3) Explore possible graduate programs
  - a. Talk to Professors at GVSU in your field of interest
  - b. Talk to Professors at GVSU that attended that graduate school (see list of professors at the end of the GVSU Undergraduate Catalog).
  - c. Use APA "Graduate Study in Psychology" guide to psychology-related graduate programs, search for MSW programs via the Council of Social Work Education web site: <http://www.cswe.org/CSWE/>, and look at the department Career Resources links: [www.gvsu.edu/psych](http://www.gvsu.edu/psych).
    - i. Look for average GPA's and GRE scores for last year's entering class to see how competitive you are.
- 4) Narrow down your school/program search
  - a. Choose as many programs as you can afford to apply to
  - b. Choose a range of programs based upon your projected ability to fit the profile of students they are looking for
    - i. Choose at least 2 or 3 that you are very-well qualified for
    - ii. Choose at least 2 or 3 that you can probably get in
    - iii. Choose 1 or 2 schools that are the highest quality that you may be qualified for
    - iv. Consider applying to different types of programs, for example, if you want a doctorate in clinical psychology also apply for master's programs. Or if you want to do therapy, consider psychology programs, social work programs and counseling programs. This is how to begin constructing a workable back-up plan
  - c. Consider visiting programs to get a personal sense of your fit with the program and make connections with faculty
- 5) Get specific information about your target programs via the web and direct contact with the program (web sites can be out of date), such as:
  - a. Application deadlines
  - b. List of materials to be submitted
  - c. Which, if any, tests are required or recommended
  - d. Semesters in which new students can start, if applicable
  - e. Are there any courses that you can take as a non-degree seeking student in the program before you are accepted to demonstrate your ability to handle graduate work?

- 6) Look at the list of faculty within your target programs
  - a. Peruse their research articles to find overlap with your interests or research experience. This is a very important step when targeting Ph.D. programs. You choose your graduate program, and they choose you, based upon the match between your interests and a faculty member. Faculty members look for students who can support their research, or even work within their labs. You want to be in a program whose faculty interests will support your specific field of interest and will allow you to do research in your field, and encourages connections to experts in that field.
  - b. Contact relevant faculty via email to discuss an area of their research that interests you. This personal connection can be very helpful.
  - c. Check to see if any of the relevant faculty have grant funded research projects. If you have research experience in their area, highlight this experience clearly in your personal statement. Sometimes this will cause that faculty to notice you favorably out of all the applicants.
- 7) Do a personal analysis of your possible strengths and weaknesses as an applicant
  - a. Talk again to faculty in the field
  - b. How can you showcase your strengths to a graduate program?
  - c. How can you minimize weak areas?
    - i. Are there courses or experiences (practicum, research, work, volunteer opportunities) that you can be involved in that would address the weaknesses?
- 8) Letters of Recommendation
  - a. Develop meaningful academic relationships with specific faculty members who can then speak knowledgeably about your fitness for graduate work. Doing research with a faculty member in the department is an excellent way to allow them to get to know you.
  - b. Have a conversation about your strengths and weaknesses as a graduate school applicant with those you have asked to write letters so the letters can be targeted to improve your chances of acceptance.
  - c. Fill out the Release of Information form for each faculty member. This form is available on the psychology department web site.
  - d. If you haven't worked closely with the person you are asking to write a recommendation, fill out the section of the Release of Information form that asks questions about your experience and interests.
  - e. Provide the faculty member with an updated resume.
- 9) Personal Statements
  - a. Different schools may provide different questions for you to address.
  - b. Craft your letter carefully, writing several drafts
  - c. Ask one or two professors to critique your personal statement. Once you rewrite your statement, have them read it again to make sure that it is a more effective statement
  - d. Consider asking someone in the Writing Center to review the statement as well

- e. Use this opportunity to showcase your strengths. Be concise and support your statements with specific examples.

10) GRE's

11) Making the choice between programs that have accepted you